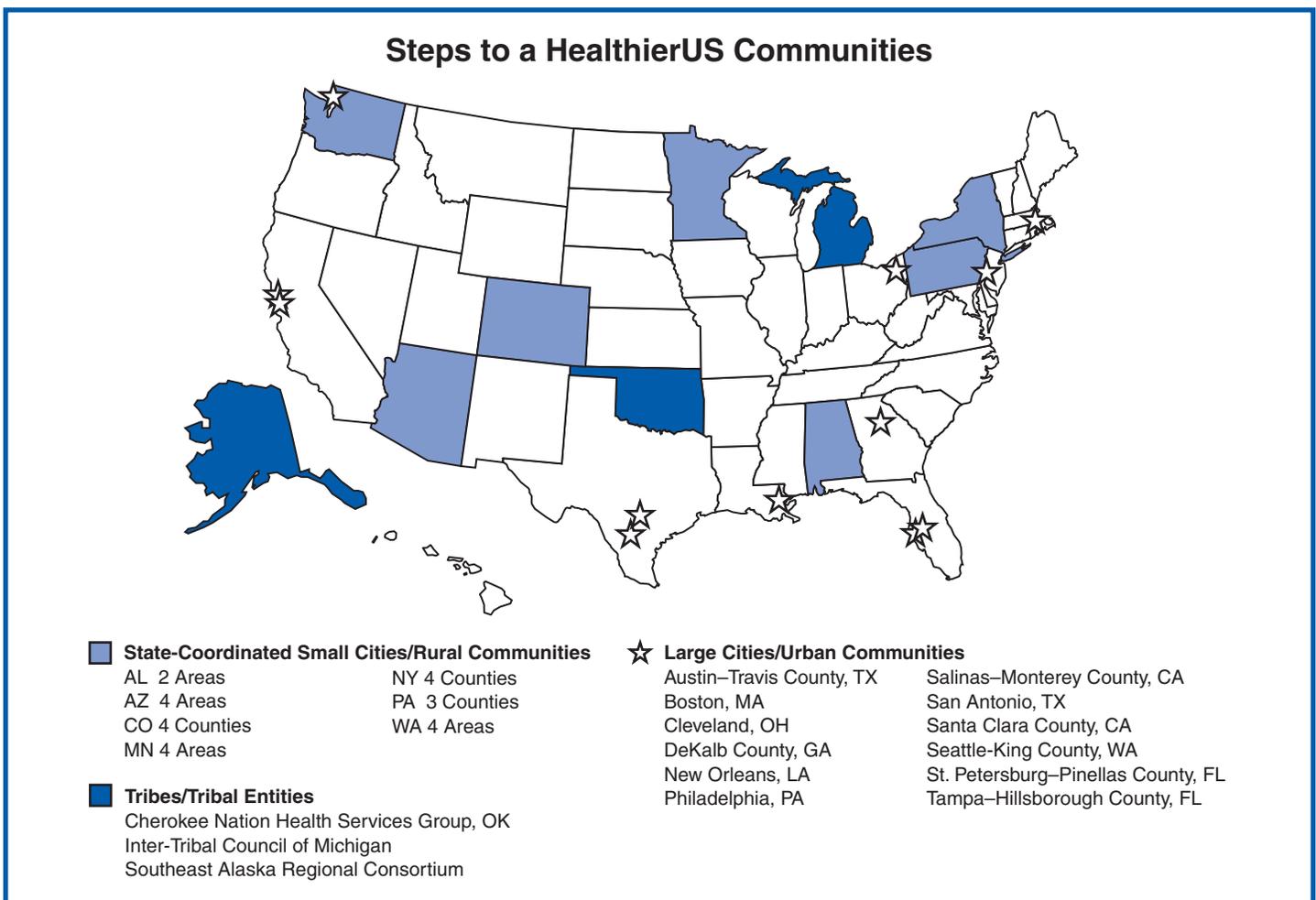


Steps to a HealthierUS Program

Preventing Chronic Diseases Through Local Community Action

2007



“If it were not for the Steps Program in Broome County, I might not be alive today. I am free of blood pressure medication, I have lost weight, and I have more energy because I live in a place that supports my healthy lifestyle.”

*Alan Wilmarth
Beneficiary of the Steps to a HealthierNY-Broome County Program*

Revised April 2007

Chronic Diseases: A National Crisis

Today, chronic diseases account for 7 in 10 deaths and affect the quality of life of 90 million Americans. Diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma are some of the leading causes of death, disability, and rising health care costs in the United States. The significant rise in chronic disease rates among adults and young people is a concern across the country, including in communities, schools, and work sites and among families, health care providers, and policy makers.

The following data indicate the extent of this burden:

- **Obesity.** In the past 30 years, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both U.S. adults and children. During 2003–2004, 33% of adults were obese, and 17% of youth aged 12–19 years were overweight. In 2000, the estimated annual cost of obesity in the United States was \$117 billion.
- **Diabetes.** In the past 15 years, the number of Americans with diagnosed diabetes has more than doubled, reaching 14.6 million in 2005. One of every 3 children born in 2000 is expected to develop diabetes during his or her lifetime. The annual cost of diabetes in 2002 was \$132 billion.
- **Asthma.** In 2005, asthma was diagnosed in 33 million people. In 2004, the disease accounted for over 13 million doctor visits and nearly 2 million emergency department visits.

CDC's National Leadership

CDC is committed to ensuring that all people, especially those at greater risk for health disparities, will achieve their optimal lifespan with the best possible quality of health in every stage of life. With new health protection goals that support healthy people in healthy places across all life stages, CDC is setting the agenda to enable people to enjoy a healthy life by delaying death and the onset of illness and disability by accelerating improvements in public health.

One way CDC is responding to the country's rising chronic disease burden is by accelerating change at the local level. To support this goal, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created the Steps to a HealthierUS Program. This program funds communities across the country to show how local initiatives can reduce the burden of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma by encouraging people to be more physically active, eat a healthy diet, and not use tobacco. The Steps Program is accelerating change at the local level by

- Creating a groundswell of activity in local communities to support healthier lifestyles and prevent chronic diseases.

Unhealthy behaviors continue to increase in the United States, putting people more at risk for chronic illnesses. For example:

- **Physical Inactivity.** More than 50% of U.S. adults do not get enough exercise to receive health benefits, and 25% are not active at all in their leisure time.
- **Poor Nutrition.** In 2005, only 23% of U.S. adults and 20% of young people ate five or more fruits and vegetables each day.
- **Tobacco Use.** Cigarette smoking is responsible for about 440,000 deaths in the United States each year. More deaths are caused each year by tobacco use than by all deaths from HIV/AIDS, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, suicide, and murder combined.

Exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, and not using tobacco can help people prevent and manage chronic diseases. However, many people in the United States do not have easy access to healthy foods and safe, convenient places to exercise. These barriers have led to increasingly sedentary lifestyles for the majority of Americans. Concentrated efforts are needed in local communities across the country to confront the national epidemic of chronic diseases.

- Reaching beyond public health and bringing together a wide range of disciplines, such as business, transportation, and city planning, to help improve the health of communities.
- Funding rural counties (through state health departments), urban areas, and tribal groups in areas where the chronic disease burden is especially high and people are most in need of prevention programs.
- Implementing public health interventions that are evidence-based and have been successful in changing people's behaviors.



Keys to Local Success

The Steps Program is using the following key principles and strategies to create and sustain change at local levels across the country.

Responding to Community Needs

Real community involvement is needed to successfully change policies and environments and prevent chronic diseases at the local level. In each community, the Steps Program brings together a diverse group of leaders from the public sector, nonprofit organizations, and private entities to design unique disease prevention and health promotion strategies that respond to local needs and assets.

Reaching Diverse Population Groups

Steps communities partner with members of racial and ethnic groups that are most at risk for chronic diseases, such as African Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, and Hispanics, to encourage healthy behaviors that can prevent disease.

Creating Nontraditional Partnerships

Steps communities are reaching out to people in nonhealth sectors—such as transportation, chambers of commerce, the media, and cooperative extension services—to increase their participation in local chronic disease prevention programs.

The Steps Program in Action

Reducing Obesity, Health Care Costs, and Absenteeism in the Workplace

The **Austin, Texas**, Steps Program partnered with Capital Metro, the transit authority in Austin to implement a work site wellness program where employees receive individual, customized health assessments and action plans for creating healthier lifestyles.

Capital Metro's 1,300 employees have access to a newly developed, 24-hour on-site fitness center, personal training sessions, nutritional counseling, and discounts for purchasing healthy items at the company's cafeteria.

Since its inception in 2003, the program has produced smaller waist sizes for some Capital Metro employees and substantial cost reductions for the company. In addition,

- Employee absences dropped more than 44% during 2004–2006.
- Health care costs increased by only 9% during 2004–2005, compared with 27% during 2003–2004.
- The company's Healthy Cafeteria program reported a 172% increase in the use of its "healthy choice" options.

These partnerships help pool resources to more effectively confront the burden of chronic disease in local communities.

Working in a Wide Range of Settings

The Steps Program collaborates with partners in many different areas where actions are needed to promote health. Examples include schools, work sites, health care settings, and faith-based settings. These partnerships are helping institutions make the kinds of decisions that will be required at the local level to prevent the rising rates of chronic disease.

Implementing Large-Scale Interventions

Steps communities are charged not only with addressing a wide range of health challenges, but also with doing so across the entire life span. This multigenerational approach is providing millions of people with integrated and urgently needed activities and programs designed to prevent chronic diseases.

Making Programs Sustainable

Steps communities collaborate with local, regional, and national groups to ensure that their programs are sustainable. Partners are often encouraged to take ownership of projects within local Steps programs and to integrate those activities into existing operations.

Creating Smoke-Free, Healthy Schools for American Indian Children

In 2002, the smoking rate in northeastern **Oklahoma**, which includes Cherokee County, was 25%. However, the smoking rate in the **Cherokee Nation** was 32%. In addition, 62% of students in Oklahoma said they had tried cigarette smoking, and 29% reported current tobacco use in 2005.

Steps to a Healthier Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma worked with 19 schools to implement CDC's *School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide*. As a result, nine schools with predominantly American Indian student populations passed 24/7 tobacco-free policies, which prohibit smoking on school grounds and during any school-sponsored functions held off campus. This strategy has been shown to be effective in reducing smoking rates.

Helping People Lose Weight, Manage Asthma

The **New York** Steps Program works with several communities to confront the state's high rates of chronic diseases and unhealthy behaviors. In 2004 in Broome County, 36% of adults were overweight and 24% were obese.

In Rockland County, asthma was identified as a priority health issue among underserved populations. To address these problems,

- The **Broome County** Steps Program implemented an 8-week, healthy lifestyle program called Mission Meltaway to address overweight and obesity. As a result of the program, participants reported that they were more knowledgeable about nutrition and physical activity, ate fewer fast foods and baked goods, and increased their fruit and vegetable consumption by one-half serving per day. More than half of participants lost weight and reduced their body mass index.
- The **Rockland County** Steps Program implemented Steps to Better Breathing, a home care program for children with asthma. This program teaches parents and children about asthma signs and symptoms, how to identify and control triggers, and how to use asthma medications correctly. It also educates people on how to quit smoking and control dust and mold in their homes. Parents and children participating in the program reported increased knowledge about asthma management and reduced inhaler use, sleep disruption, and activity limitations.

Promoting Fruits and Vegetables in Schools

The Steps Program in **Pinellas County, Florida**, implemented a program in K–12 schools to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among students and staff. Lunch lines were revamped to display prepackaged salads that are easy for children to open and eat; school administrators, cafeteria managers, and food service employees received training in the importance of healthy eating and proper food preparation; and a local vegetable distributor set up farmers' markets on school grounds. As a result,

- 84% of the schools and 90% of their students and staff participate in the farmers' markets.
- More than 3,700 students and staff increased their fruit and vegetable intake in the program's third year.
- The Pinellas County School district tied for second place nationally among large school districts on the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine's School Lunch Report Card for encouraging the consumption of healthy foods and educating students about nutrition.

- The school district adopted a policy to provide physical education five days a week for all elementary school students.

Promoting Primary Care and Reducing Blood Sugar Levels

The Steps Program in **Seattle, Washington**, partnered with a local medical center to provide case management services to emergency room patients with asthma or diabetes who did not already have a primary care provider.

As a result,

- Nearly half (48%) of these patients were connected with a primary care provider.
- Patients with diabetes who received case management services showed significant improvement in their blood sugar levels.
- Emergency room use declined among patients who received case management services and were connected with a primary care provider.

Reaching More People Through the YMCA

The Steps Program partnered with the **YMCA of the USA** to increase its reach and impact at the local level. Local YMCAs that are located in or partnered with a Steps community receive mini-grants to create projects that support Steps programs.

Some examples of collaborative activities include opening existing facilities for after-hours physical activity, setting up health education camps for American Indian children, changing the physical environment to increase opportunities for physical activity, supporting the creation of healthy vending machines designed by kids, and promoting healthy eating and physical activity curriculum in schools.

Future Directions

Urgent problems require urgent solutions. The Steps Program at CDC will continue to provide a "tipping point" for the nation by supporting communities that show what can be done at the local level to prevent chronic diseases for all Americans. Steps communities, in collaboration with institutions and organizations throughout our society, will continue to take the kinds of actions that are needed to prevent chronic diseases and support healthier lifestyles.

For more information, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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